

NOTES ON TWO PAPUAN THROWING STICKS.

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(Communicated by C. Hedley, F.L.S.)

(Plate LVIII.)

Preceding volumes of these Proceedings contain a series of articles by Mr. R. Etheridge, junr., describing and figuring in detail numerous varieties of the womerah or Australian throwing stick.*

Only in recent years has it been announced that a like implement is also employed by the Papuans of Northern New Guinea. Finsch figured and described† a specimen which he collected at Venushuk, New Guinea, and Edge Partington illustrates, apparently by a copy of Finsch's figure, this throwing stick.‡ Ratzel in the *Natural History of Man* also gives figures.§

By far the fullest account of the Papuan form of the throwing stick, however, we owe to Dr. F. v. Luschan, who in "*Das Wurfholz in New Holland und in Oceanien*," Bastian Festschrift, Berlin, 1896, pp. 131-155, Pl. ix., x., xi., has dealt exhaustively with the subject. Specimens of the Papuan type which have lately been acquired by my friend Mr. Norman Hardy do not exactly coincide with any portrayed by Dr. v. Luschan. I have therefore obtained permission to lay before the Society the following account and accompanying drawings of two specimens, the

* Series ii. Vol. vi. p. 699, fig.; Vol. vii. pp. 170, 399, Pls. iii. and xi.; Vol. viii. p. 300, Pl. xiv.; Macleay Memorial Vol. p. 236.

† Ann. K.K. Hofmus. Vol. iii. 1888, Pl. xv. f. 5.

‡ Ethnographical Album, 189, Ser. 1, Vol. ii. Pl. 37, f. 1.

§ Ratzel, "*The History of Mankind*," English Ed. I. 1896, p. 181.

former of which is said to have come from Berlin Harbour, German New Guinea; the second is without a history.

The first weapon (fig. 1) is made from a piece of nearly straight bamboo, weight $6\frac{1}{4}$ oz., 2 ft. 2 in. in length and barely one inch in diameter, embracing three nodes. At a distance of $2\frac{3}{4}$ inches from the distal end and half an inch from a joint, a transverse incision has been made through two-thirds of the diameter, thence the cut gradually and obliquely ascends to the upper surface, terminating at a point $11\frac{1}{2}$ inches distant, the whole incision somewhat resembling what is technically known to carpenters as a scarf. Two inches in front of the above-described incision a slot $4\frac{1}{2}$ in. by $\frac{1}{2}$ in. wide has been excavated for the reception of a piece of hard wood richly carved in high relief and inclined at an acute angle towards the distal end, which evidently was intended as a rest for the spear when being aimed and thrown. To retain this in its place are two rings of split and interwoven bamboo, two inches apart, these being in their turn held together by means of strands of fibre. The entire carving is eight inches long, two broad, and half an inch thick, and the design that of a conventionalised crocodile, the head, body and tail being suggested by appropriate segments.

The head is portrayed with a considerable degree of accuracy, the nasal prominences and eyes being carefully located; on the body seven imbricating scales indicate the dorsal scutes, three concentric grooves divide the sides into oval ridges; on the dorsal surface of the tail scutes are again suggested by a different method of treatment, while the sides harmonise with the body. In dealing with the ventral surface, the carver has allowed his artistic faculty unrestricted scope, the teeth of the reptile being indicated by curved bars which unite the upper and lower surface, the last bar being carried in a bow from the neck to the tail and offering a grasp for the previously mentioned bamboo rings. Distal of the spear socket one inch is ornamented by a pattern of a series of circles and conjoined loops containing lozenges; distal of this again it has been cut down so as to make a neck terminating in a knob.

The second weapon (fig. 2) is similar in construction to that above described, but is somewhat longer, being 32 inches from end to end and weighing $4\frac{1}{2}$ oz. Rather more than 2 inches from the distal end a sloping groove, as in the previously described implement, has been cut for a distance of $15\frac{3}{4}$ inches, not as in the first instance in a plane with a carved rest, but inclining to a considerable degree towards the right, thus indicating the side on which the spear was held. The carved wooden projection against which the spear was rested is 7 inches long, inclines at the same angle and in the same direction as the former, and is attached to the bamboo shaft at both ends by means of woven bands of split bamboo, midway between which is a third and lighter band. This highly interesting feature differs very much in character from fig. 1, being much flatter, carved in lower relief, and is more conventional in design.

An elongated human (?) head on the upper end is directed from a proximal in a distal direction by a curved and pierced band connected with the body of the implement; this surrounds two intersecting pierced ovals which are proximally attached to an irregular elongated triangular body of which the upper or dorsal edge is unevenly serrated and pierced, the whole forming an acute angle with the main body of the instrument; the flattened sides are decorated in a design formed by successive curved bands, chevrons and dots carved in low relief. A handle convenient for grasping is afforded by a finely plaited bamboo knob or bulb which is fastened in its place by a strong wooden peg. The distal termination is in its main character like that of fig. 1, but for a distance of 2 inches is carved in a series of bands, chevrons and dots harmonising in design with the flattened sides of the spear rest.

Some ethnologists have traced a connection between the Australian Aborigines and the Dravidians of India. It has been suggested to me by my friend Mr. C. Hedley, F.L.S., that the isolated occurrence of a womerah on the north coast of New Guinea may indicate a vestige of the emigrants on the line of march, for it is even possible that while the identity of a race

might have slowly disappeared through intermarriage, yet a custom or weapon could have descended unchanged. On the other hand, the throwing stick is not the exclusive heritage of the Australians or their kin; indeed, it may have been independently arrived at by various peoples.

The Papuan implement is broadly distinguished from any of the numerous aspects assumed by the womerah in Australia. In the former case, the spear end is received into a socket; in the latter the spear is cupped to receive the peg of the womerah.* Again, the former is remarkable for the raised, ornately carved crest against which Dr. Luschian states the spear rests, for which no homologue occurs in the Australian type.

The Micronesian form may be described as like the Papuan, but without the raised spear rest; in Micronesia Keate† long ago described it from the Pelews, and Luschian figures it both from that Archipelago and from the Carolines.‡ A mechanical device for propelling spears from a loop of rope has been recorded from New Caledonia.§ The Esquimaux possess a form of the throwing stick which has been described at length by Otis T. Mason;|| mention of the use of this instrument by natives of the Polar regions has also been made by Nordenskjöld¶ and Nansen.** Lieutenant W. H. Hooper mentions them as being used by the Esquimaux of Icy Reef, Humphreys Point.††

* Nevertheless, Mr. Harry Stockdale has informed me that he has observed an exception to this rule in the case of a Northern Territory (Australia) tribe who used a socketed womerah.

† Keate, "An Account of the Pelew Islands," 1788, p. 314.

‡ *Loc. cit.* pp. 133, 152, fig. 9.

§ Edge Partington, *loc. cit.* Second Series, Pl. 67, f. 11. Stevens "Flint Chips," 1870, p. 304.

|| Smithsonian Institute, Ann. Rep. 1884, Part 2, pp. 279-289, Plates.

¶ "Voyage of the Vega," London, 1881, Vol. 2, p. 105, fig. 5.

** "First Crossing of Greenland," Vol. 2, pp. 263, 340.

†† "The Tents of the Tuski," London, 1853 p. 259.

The Central and South American throwing sticks have been dealt with in a most thorough manner by Dr. Ed. Seler* in a paper entitled "Altmexicanische Wurfbretter," which is finely illustrated both by woodcuts and coloured plates. Dr. Hjalmar Stolpe in the same publication† communicates a valuable article on the subject, and furthermore gives illustrations of the weapons used by the Tecunas, Canibos, Quito, Campevas and Chambiriguas tribes of South America, in all of which the spear is kept in place by a peg.

EXPLANATION OF FIGURES.

The right hand division of the plate constitutes fig. 1; the left, fig. 2.

* Internationales Archiv für Ethnographie, 1890, Band iii. pp. 137-148, Pl. xi.

† *Loc. cit.* pp. 234-238.